

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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June 1, 2009

Dennis Bedford
California Department of Fish and Game, Region 5
4949 Viewridge Avenue
San Diego, California 92123

Aaron O. Allen
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Ventura County Field Office
2151 Alessandro Drive, Suite 110
Ventura, California 93001

Comments on Army Corps of Engineers and the California Department of Fish and Game on the Draft Joint Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report for Newhall Ranch Resource Management and Development Plan and Spineflower Conservation Plan (SCH No. 2000011025)

Dear Mssrs. Bedford and Allen:

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is the principle State planning agency for the Newhall Ranch project area. The Draft Joint Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIS-EIR) is a landmark document. Its clarity and thoroughness are to be commended. The comprehensive approach to a project-wide section 404 permit, Candidate Conservation Agreement, CESA permit, and Master Streambed Alteration Agreement benefits all stakeholders if impact avoidance guides decision making.

Maximizing the protection of Santa Clara River 100-year flood plain, linear feet of tributary drainage, occupied San Fernando Valley spine flower habitat, and increasing the number bridges versus culverts is completely in the public interest. The Conservancy concurs with the Draft EIS-EIR that the obvious environmentally superior alternative is Alternative 7. Alternative 7 emphasizes avoidance of significant impacts. This avoidance will greatly reduce mitigation and infrastructure costs. It will minimize virtually all temporal loss of habitat resources addressed in the Draft EIS-EIR. The two percent take of the State-listed San Fernando Valley spine flower is acceptable given the project's permanent open space benefits.

Army Corps of Engineers
California Department of Fish and Game
Draft Joint EIS and EIR for Newhall Ranch Resource Management and Development
Plan and Spineflower Conservation Plan
June 1 , 2009
Page 2

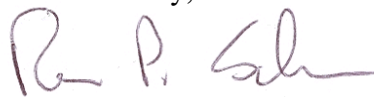
The key feature of Alternative 7 is its avoidance of wholesale drainage course impacts. All of the other alternatives involved regrading virtually all of the tributary drainages to make their grades match preferred development grades. Although the artificially created channels might be wider than the existing channels, they still all would require numerous drop structures and armoring. Alternative 7 implements sound geomorphological, ground water replenishment, and conservation biology practices by pulling all development and bank stabilization out of the 100-year flood plain of the Santa Clara River and avoiding the regrading of virtually all drainage courses. Likewise the alternative employs a maximum number of bridges over drainages rather than artificial and constricting culverts.

The multi-thousand-acre development area should have enough room to allow for these prudent impact avoidance modifications. Alternative 7 allows for a minimum of 16,471 residential dwelling units and 3.82 million square feet of commercial-industrial development floor area. One portion of the document states that Alternative 7 would allow 17,323 residential units and 3.76 million square feet.

Because of the Draft EIS-EIR findings the Conservancy can support partial build-out of the prior Specific Plan approval only if a section 404 permit, Candidate Conservation Agreement, CESA permit, and Master Streambed Alteration Agreement are issued to permit the regulated activities under Alternative 7. We urge the Corps and CDFG to limit their actions and permits within the parameters defined by Alternative 7. By definition, alternatives in an EIR must be feasible to be considered.

Please address any questions to Paul Edelman of our staff at the above address and by phone at (310) 589-3200 ext. 128.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "R. P. Schafer", is written over the printed name.

RONALD P. SCHAFER
Chairperson